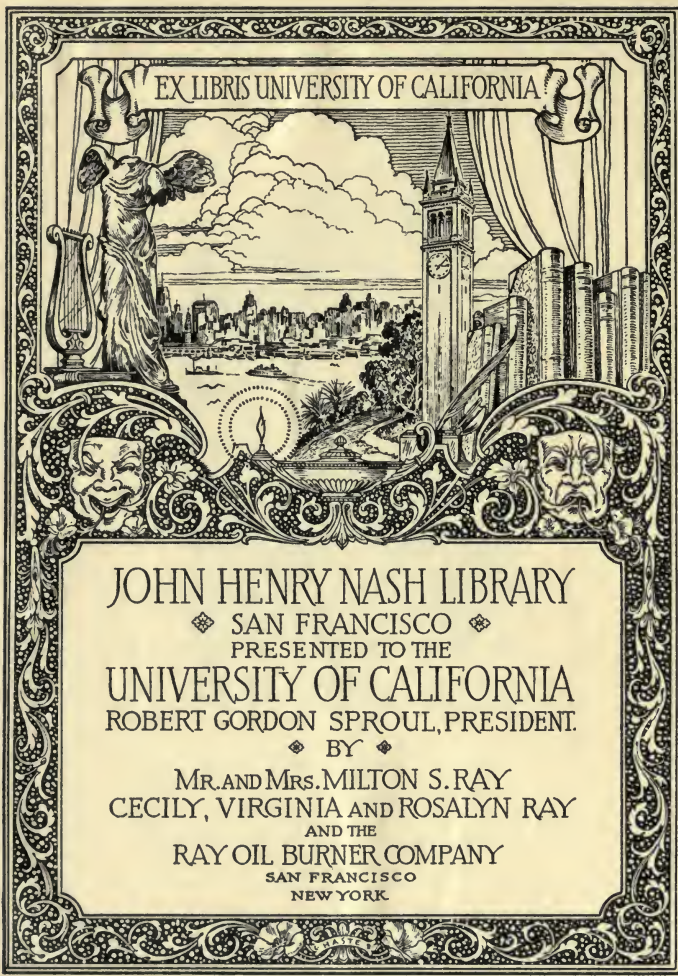


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THE END OF THE PLAY

THE END OF THE PLAY

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

NEW YORK
PRIVATELY PRINTED
CHRISTMAS 1915

TO THE
MEMORY
OF
MY MOTHER

THE END OF THE PLAY

It was Mr. Thackeray's fortunate fate to "lay the weary pen aside" on the very eve of a Solemn Christmas-tide of which he sang not too mournfully. The season, of course, is one of "health and love and mirth." But there comes at some time in every life a moment when the lights go out and the curtain is dropped and the bright pageant of existence is shrouded for a while. It is the end of the play. We all know well enough that the curtain will rise and the show go on again, and tomorrow's audience will clap its hands in renewed applause. But to a few, the performance will never be quite the same.

C. M. F.

Christmas 1915

THE END OF THE PLAY

The play is done; the curtain drops,
 Slow falling, to the prompter's bell:
A moment yet the actor stops,
 And looks around, to say farewell.
It is an irksome word and task;
 And when he's laughed and said his say,
He shows, as he removes the mask,
 A face that's anything but gay.

One word, ere yet the evening ends,
Let's close it with a parting rhyme,
And pledge a hand to all young friends,
As fits the merry Christmas-time.
On life's wide scene you, too, have parts,
That Fate ere long shall bid you play;
Good night! with honest gentle hearts
A kindly greeting go away!

Good night!—I'd say, the griefs, the joys,
Just hinted in this mimic page,
The triumphs and defeats of boys,
Are but repeated in our age.
I'd say, your woes were not less keen,
Your hopes more vain, than those of men;
Your pangs or pleasures of fifteen,
At forty-five played o'er again.

I'd say, we suffer and we strive
Not less nor more as men than boys;
With grizzled beards at forty-five,
As erst at twelve, in corduroys;
And if, in time of sacred youth,
We learned at home to love and pray,
Pray Heaven, that early Love and Truth
May never wholly pass away.

And in the world, as in the school,
I'd say, how fate may change and shift;
The prize be sometimes with the fool,
The race not always to the swift.
The strong may yield, the good may fall,
The great man be a vulgar clown,
The knave be lifted over all,
The kind cast pitilessly down.

Who knows the inscrutable design?
Blessed be He who took and gave!
Why should your mother, Charles, not mine,
Be weeping at her darling's grave!
We bow to Heaven that will'd it so,
That darkly rules the fate of all,
That sends the respite or the blow,
That's free to give or to recall.

This crowns his feast with wine and wit:

Who brought him to that mirth and state?
His betters, see, below him sit,

Or hunger hopeless at the gate.

Who bade the mud from Dives' wheel

To spurn the rags of Lazarus?

Come, brother, in that dust we'll kneel,

Confessing Heaven that ruled it thus.

So each shall mourn, in life's advance,
Dear hopes, dear friends, untimely killed;
Shall grieve for many a forfeit chance,
A longing passion unfulfilled.
Amen! whatever fate be sent, —
Pray God the heart may kindly glow,
Although the head with cares be bent,
And whitened with the winter snow.

Come wealth or want, come good or ill,
Let young and old accept their part,
And bow before the Awful Will,
And bear it with an honest heart.
Who misses, or who wins the prize?
Go, lose or conquer as you can:
But if you fail, or if you rise,
Be each, pray God, a gentleman.

A gentleman, or old or young!
 (Bear kindly with my humble lays;)
The sacred chorus first was sung
 Upon the first of Christmas days;
The shepherds heard it overhead —
 The joyful angels raised it then:
Glory to Heaven on high, it said,
 And peace on earth to gentle men.

My song, save this, is little worth;
I lay the weary pen aside,
And wish you health, and love, and mirth,
As fits the solemn Christmas-tide.
As fits the holy Christmas birth,
Be this, good friends, our carol still —
Be peace on earth, be peace on earth,
To men of gentle will.

*Of this book two hundred copies were printed for Thomas
Nast Fairbanks by The Torch Press in December nineteen
hundred and fifteen*



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